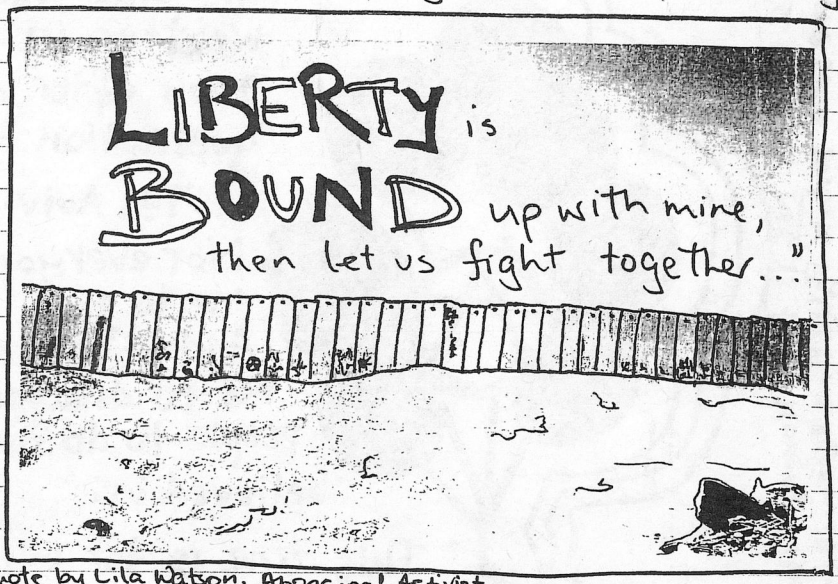
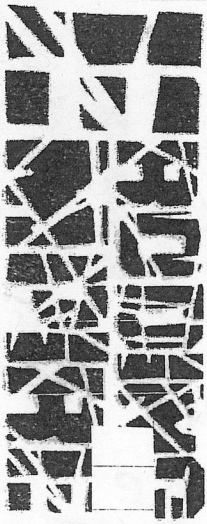
"If you've come here to help me, You're wasting your time- But if you're here because your



quote by Lila Watson. Aboriginal Activist.

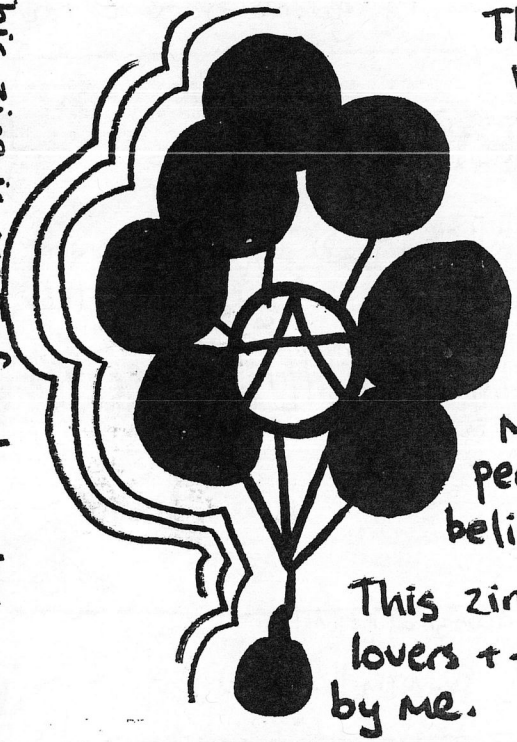
a recount of Queeruption Tel Aviv + my trip to the West Bank



FREEDOM

→ Liberty Bound is a zine for the queers who wanna fight back xxx

This zine is NOT for: homophobes, sexists, racists, people who think Palestine is an illegal terrorist state, conservative religious zealots of any variety, Steve Irwin.



This zine was written in August 2006 after attending queeruption 9 in Tel Aviv.

Not everyone wanted me to go.

And it was hard for me to disappoint people to do something I believed in.

This zine is for my comrades, lovers + friends who stood by me.

esp. Hayward St kids - Lauren, Soph, Jeni

Blakk bloc - Curtis, Karlee, Claire P

Also, Juliana, Annaliese, Louise, Renae, Chanelle.

I love all of you so much. xxx

My very brief encounter with the Israeli occupation of Palestine...

When I left Australia I didn't really know very much about the Israel - Palestine conflict at all. I'd been to a few talks about it and (one at Queer Collaborations a few weeks before I left) seen the maps with the varying borders coloured in. I'd heard a small amount about the intifada's and what I now know as the 'nakba' in Arabic, meaning great disaster, also known in Israeli terms as the 'war of independence.' I had heard David Hick's letters referring to the Zionist propaganda machine- but I wasn't really prepared for my time in Tel Aviv or the West Bank.

I should prefix this by saying that what happened to the Jews in the Second World War was appalling and in no way do I support what happened in those dark times. I can't fix those dark times by speaking out about it, but I do have the ability to speak out and try to change what is happening today in Palestine.

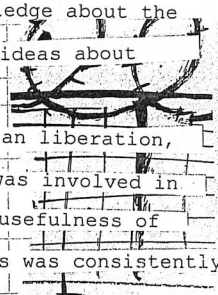
I absolutely believe that Jews should be able to live in Palestine. I just think that they should be seeking permission from the Palestinian authority rather than smashing it up, because I don't believe in a divine right to a holy land. No gods, no masters and all that.

• Racism on arrival

It was quite a shock arriving in Israel and being faced with the government funded pro-war billboards "To those fighting in the north- we are with you!", the nationalist grafitti on every street corner (my personal favourite being a blue Star of David with "Israeli's: still alive, Israel: still ours" scrawled underneath it) or more blatantly, still sprayed on the street in Jerusalem, "Gas the Arabs!". I had been wrongly informed that Israel was comparative to a 'western state' with secular values and lip service to multi-culturalism, when it was clearly an intensely conservative religious state funded almost entirely by the U.S without even a hint of tolerance towards the Arab portion of the population. I am not saying western states have it right, just that Israel is different. Think the RU486* level of non-secular government and then multiply that by about a million.

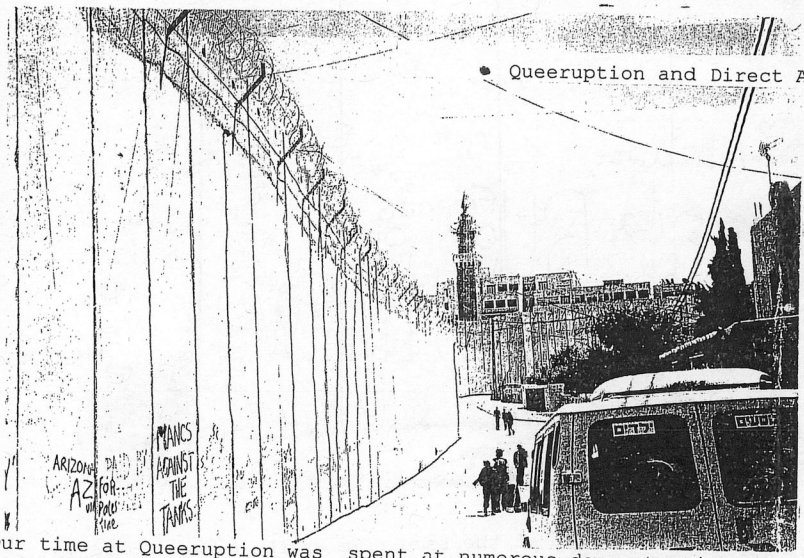
I was lucky enough to be in Palestine-Israel during the Queeruption gathering. This meant contacts not only with Israelis opposed to the occupation, but with foreigners working in Palestine, Palestinians (living in both Jaffa and the Westbank), and also with the organisations such as the International Solidarity Movement (ISM), ASWAT- the queer womens and trans* group for Palestinians, Anarchists against the Wall, ICAHD- an NGO working to stop the demolition of Palestinian Houses, as well as other networks that were helping/attempting to build a grassroots opposition to the occupation. It was really important for me to make those connections because it's exceptionally hard to find left-wing activists and others who are in favour of a two state solution, let alone a one state solution with that state being Palestine.

Again, I don't have a lot of historical/economic knowledge about the situation and know that many people on this e-list have ideas about whether any Israelis at all can be involved in Palestinian liberation, but I am only commenting on the communities/activism I was involved in ing my time there. I am open to discussions about the usefulness of Israelis' involvement. The solidarity work of Israelis was consistently referred to in context that they were doing so on stolen land, the Israeli portion of which was growing daily thanks to the aparteid wall.



*RU486 was an indication of how An Australian Catholic politician thought he could ban an abortion pill because his "morals" were more important than the Australian medical boards

Israeli wall of death →

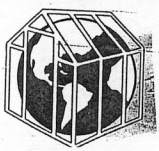


Free ★

Our time at Queeruption was spent at numerous demonstrations, parties and activist planning meetings. The more notable demo's were:
1. Saturday 5th August- the demo against the war on Lebanon. These demos were being held weekly in Tel Aviv and this one had about 6000 people at it. The chants were not unlike ours at home and included "In Beirut, In Tel Aviv, In Gaza, In the U.S, children deserve to live, people deserve to live." And the classic "Hey there minister of defense, how many kids did you kill today?" (Oh, in Hebrew these chants rhyme!)
2. Tuesday 8th August- a demo was held at 10pm outside the minister of defense's home in the ritzy area of north Tel Aviv. The chants were "No sleep for Lebanon, no sleep for you!" and "No peace til Israel gets out of Lebanon!" There were others but I was sick that day and didn't go to the demo, I know it's bad but I was still jetlagged and caught a cold from the change in temperature and was really ill…

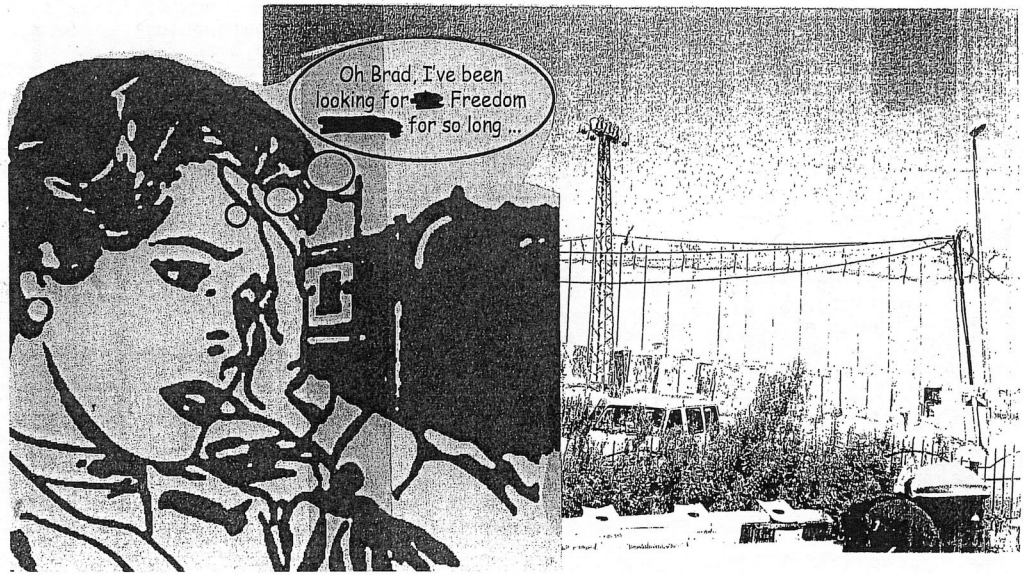
3. August 11th- The demo on the west bank in Bil'in organised by the ISM against the aparteid wall. The wall is responsible for Israel now occupying 60% of what was Bil'in. Similar to the anti-war demo this occurred weekly every Friday after prayer time. Palestinian activists said it was the most violent it had been in a year because the usual soldiers were in Lebanon and the new recruits were unsteady and violent. This was the demo where one of the Israelis, Limor, got shot in the head with rubber bullets after he turned his back and was walking away. One of the bullets lodged in his head and he was hospitalised, where he remains now in a steady condition. We didn't even get close enough to see the wall before they opened fire and blasted us with sound grenaides and sent tear gas were flying.

This is very normal in the West Bank, but usually not so thick and fast. The young kids were still throwing stones, only to be met with gun fire. The Israeli forces use rubber coated lead bullets instead of live ammunition in Bil'in because of the presence of Internationals and Israelis. In the village next to Bil'in where there has been no organised protest with Israelis and internationals, two children under the age of fourteen were shot dead by the Israeli forces with live ammunition. (www.live-from-palestine.blogspot.com)



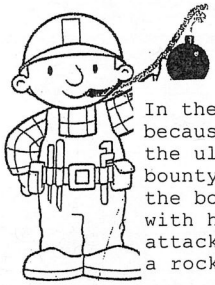
4. The illegal demo scheduled at the same time as the cancelled World Pride, was again, one of the most violent I have ever been to. The queeruption crew went to make a point about the war and occupation being a queer issue. The chants included "No pride, no pride, no pride in the occupation." And "It's hard to get out of the closet, it's easy to get out of Lebanon." The cops came down really hard and arrested people for holding Palestinian and Lebanese flags. Some of the World Pride organisers were quoted in the press saying that "Anarchists hijacked the event" but the queeruption organisers were quoted saying "It's WORLD pride, so surely the voices of Queer Lebanese and Queer Palestinians deserved to be heard?"

5. There were quite a lot of midnight occupations of various government buildings and war profiteer corporations etc, but internationals were encouraged not to attend for fear we would all be deported, which we probably would have been.



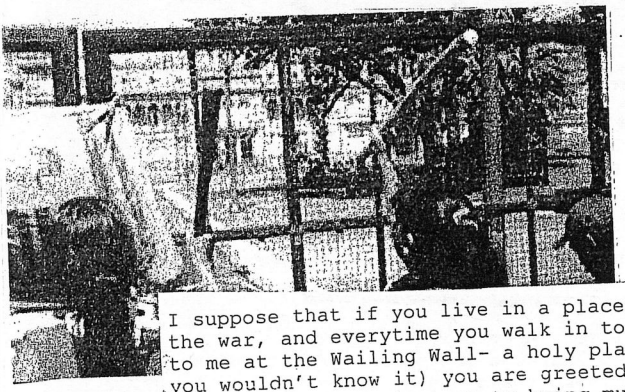
Israeli responses to the left

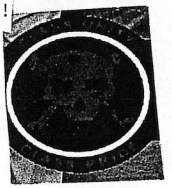
The responses to the demonstrations by not only organised Zionist groups, but passers by in general was astounding. At the Anti-war demo people gathered on the opposite side of the road and shouted in response to the people wearing t-shirts soaked in fake blood, "Go to Haifa and let them spill some real blood." Some held signs saying- "What the left doesn't understand is that it's our sons of light against their sons of darkness." And the same one used universally against people who support Palestine, "The blood of countless Jews on your hands" as if fighting for peace in Lebanon was the equivalent of killing Jews. It was an extremely weird experience for me because at home it was easy to tell that even if there were a few rabid racists, the majority of people actually opposed the War on Iraq- here the majority were for the war in Lebanon!



In the lead up to what was to be World Pride (it was later cancelled because of the war on Lebanon) pamphlets were distributed in Jerusalem by the ultra right orthodox Jews that promised a NIS 20,000 ($4,530.05 USD) bounty for each homosexual killed during the pride parade. In addition to the bounty offer, the two-page pamphlet also provided directions complete with hand-drawn diagrams how to construct weapons that could be used to attack homosexuals. The three preferred weapons were a Molotov cocktail, a rock-filled sock and a nail-studded stick. (Covenantnews.com)

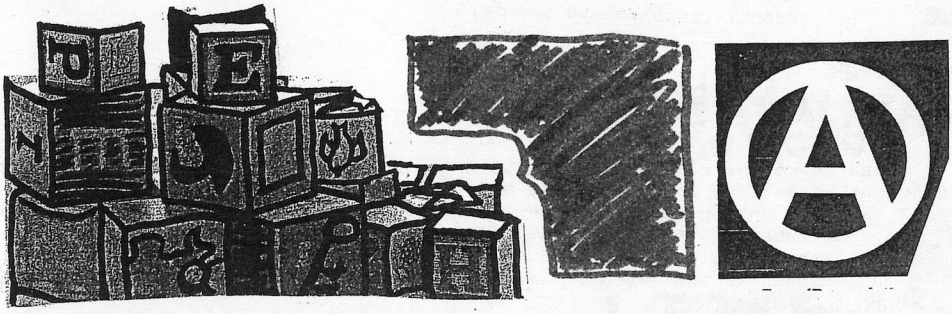
But the Palestinians are the terrorists, just remember that!





I suppose that if you live in a place surrounded by billboards supporting the war, and everytime you walk in to a religious monument (this happened to me at the Wailing Wall- a holy place for BOTH Muslims and Jews, but you wouldn't know it) you are greeted with rabbi's holding a donation box calling out, "Donate here to bring much glory to the Jews and much misfortune to the Palestinians!" and when you are not legally allowed to visit the West Bank even if you marry a Palestinian- the law says you must live separately, with 2 or 3 years of compulsary army conscription for men and women- the hatred and bigotry becomes so normalised. (News from Within July 06)

An example of this was these horrid orange arm bands that were attached to cars and peoples bags and on shop fronts . The orange bands were a solidarity campaign run during the so-called evacuation of the Gaza strip last year. Wearing the band is supposed to be a sign that you think its horrific that a small number of Israelis should have to give anything to Palestine. They are a normalised indication of hate, and they are everywhere in Jerusalem. A note on that "evacuation" is that as 2 settlements of Jews were pulled out of Gaza, two more were set up in what was internationally agreed to be the Palestinian area of Jerusalem during the same week = ie: total crap.

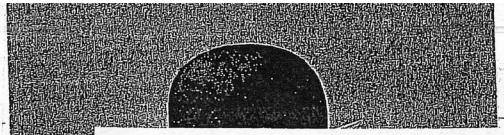


Another really clear example of how normalised it is was when we were having a fundraiser on the beach for Limor. As we drank on the beautiful beaches we kept looking up to see the low flying helicopters flying North to Lebanon and South to Gaza. They flew in groups of two. On the way there, you could see ammunition (maybe bombs or missiles, or leaflets warning of bombs and missiles) attached to the bottom of the helicopters, on the way back (usually about an hour and a half later) you could see nothing attached to the base of the helicopter anymore. I don't know if they had to fly that low, or if it was just a gentle reminder that Israel is boss and Israel is secure.

Most of us foreigners were given that gentle reminder via extreme hassle at the Israeli airport. Despite playing as dumb as possible about the political situation, I was still asked if I knew any Muslims and what their names were! (I was also detained for 2 hours and strip searched when I left Israel, but that's another story!) As the queeruptors discussed later, it's important to make sure foreigners are sh*t scared to go to Palestine, coz otherwise we might find out that Palestinians aren't extremist terrorists, no more than the ones in the Whitehouse and Kirribilli, in fact they're normal people living in the increasingly difficult conditions of an illegal occupation. And worse, if the internationals told the Israelis that all this 'security' was bollocks, well, it could work out to be quite a mess.

It's amazing what is justified all over the world in the name of security.

The Separation Fence/ Security Barrier/ Apartheid Wall
It's 8m high, built either around or through established Palestinian cities and is made of concrete and double sided electronic fencing topped with barbed wire. There is currently a patrol route in between the unbuilt areas patrolled by the Israeli military. (The Other Israel, 05/06)
Israeli military planners, when testifying at Supreme Court Hearings, claim it to be a "temporary security installation" - just like some harmless modern art, really! But having traveled along it, through established check points and avoiding roaming check points between it, it's quite clear the wall is a long term political border.
As noted by the Israeli Committee Against Housing Demolition, or ICAHD (a group established to stop the demolition of Palestinian houses) "It is no co-incidence that the wall has partitioned off the best farm land and most of the water in Israel's favour, and has destroyed Palestinian economic interfaces and market towns." The planned route is 75km long and has only 5km on the Green Line (the 1949 Armistice line) which means that even by their own legalities, this wall is a sham.



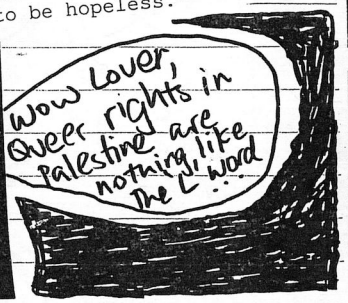
Notes from an interview with Maton Cohen from Anarchists against the wall Maton lost an eye in a situation not unlike the one we were involvd in at Bil'in. He got separated from the group at what was intended to be a non-violent demonstration, and was shot clear in the eye at close range by an Israeli soldier. As he points out, "When I was wounded the media reported it, but the 14 Palestinians wounded that day went unreported, unknown… Until today no soldier has been prosecuted for killing unarmed Palestinian demonstrators, it's a disgrace."

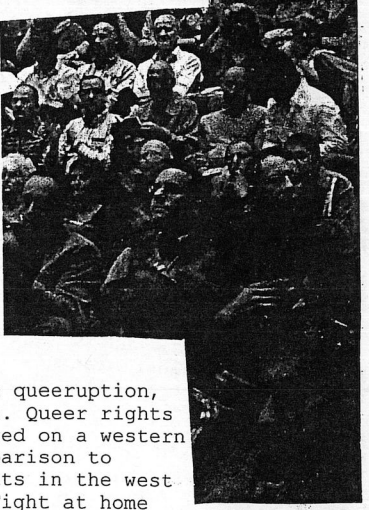
He goes on, "In Tel Aviv everybody walks care-free in the street and sits in cafes. While there have been terrorist acts carried out in Tel Aviv people have the space to forget that, where as half an hour from here it is HELL and no one knows about it. Half an hour from here kids are stuck at checkpoints on their way home from primary school for hours at a time and no one knows." It really made me realise that living under occupation is living in a permanent state of terror.

My feelings about the West Bank

When I went to Palestine the first time, to Bil'in, we drove past a check point, trekked through some bush and got picked up by Palestinian taxis. The second time I went to Ramallah I was in a mini bus and we drove so as to avoid roaming checkpoints. I think it's important to point out here that if this wall is finished then Israelis and foreigners won't be able to visit Palestine in the way we can now. There's a year, maximum two years if this wall goes ahead, til what I was able to do this month is almost impossible.

But it won't last. At no stage during my time in Palestine or Tel Aviv did I feel that things weren't going to change sometime soon. The situation is too vibrant to be hopeless."





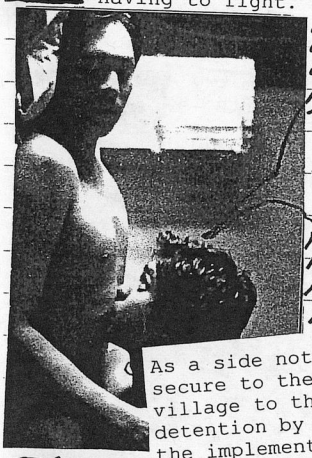
Queer rights in Palestine

As an organiser from ASWAT wasted no time in telling us at queeruption, Palestine will rise up in it's own time, on it's own terms. Queer rights will be achieved on their terms not ours. It can't be judged on a western scale- in terms of our rights and freedoms at home in comparison to theirs- the occupation means everything is different. Rights in the west are not superior, don't pity them, don't fight for them. Fight at home and there will be no way of missing it when Palestinians win their own liberation, because it will help the left all over the globe. It's really important to understand the occupation when discussing queer rights in Palestine because it's the same as ever- it's bad for all and worse for queers.

Queer Rights in Palestine cont'...

The Israeli Security Service cynically uses Palestinian homophobia and queerphobia to coerce queers to choose between recruitment to its ranks (becoming a spy for Israel) and forceful outing. Many Palestinians choose the first option to save their lives, or avoid a life forcefully denying who they are. As such, every queer is considered a potential collaborator. The harsh reality is that even if queer Palestinians get this legal escape to the gay paradise of Tel Aviv, because of racism, the possibility of your employment making ends meet is so slim that a huge portion, especially the trans* Palestinians, become prostitutes just to afford to get by. (The News Within)

ASWAT have met with as many progressive law makers in Palestine as they could and have been told countless times, "We live under occupation, there's no time now for queer rights." This is the battle that ASWAT is having to fight.



This would be much much sexier if I wasn't so worried about making it out of Israel alive... If only my main concern was how much Prada shoes cost instead...

As a side note, even if pro-queer laws were passed, law makers cannot secure to their constituents so much as the right to move freely from one village to the next, or safe guard any of them from interrogation, or detention by Israeli security service officials, let alone closely follow the implementation or affects of law changes.

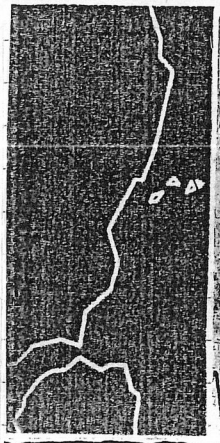
It has been said that an Israeli Leiutenant in charge of one check point has more concrete power over daily Palestinians life than the whole Palestinian government.

(Oh, and in case you missed it, the impotency- i love that word- of the Palestinian government isn't because it's a non-heirarchical anarchist utopia- it's because of Israel. I checked.)

I just wanted to finish by saying that I have a lot to learn. I wrote this because I needed to get it out of my system. I hope that it isn't politically repugnant, I am doing my best! And usually my instincts aren't too bad. I wrote this because I am an anti-capitalist and a revolutionary and I think it's important to try and talk about the effects of occupation, racism and queerphobia, and why the struggles against them must be combined.

In love and struggle,
Claire English
2006.

References worth noting



Susans Blogs. www.live-from-palestine.blogspot.com and http://from-palestine.livejournal.com/ Susan is a friend i made at queeruption. She works with the Palestinian Hydrology Group on a water rights campaign.

An article called "Queen Hussein" in News from Within. It was written by another queeruptor, Liad Kantorwicz. Its a lefty magazine. Noam Chomsky is on its advisory board so its quite famous.

An article called "The choice is now" by Angela Godfrey-Goldstein in the ICAHD newsletter. I have a hard copy but it may be available at www.icahd.org

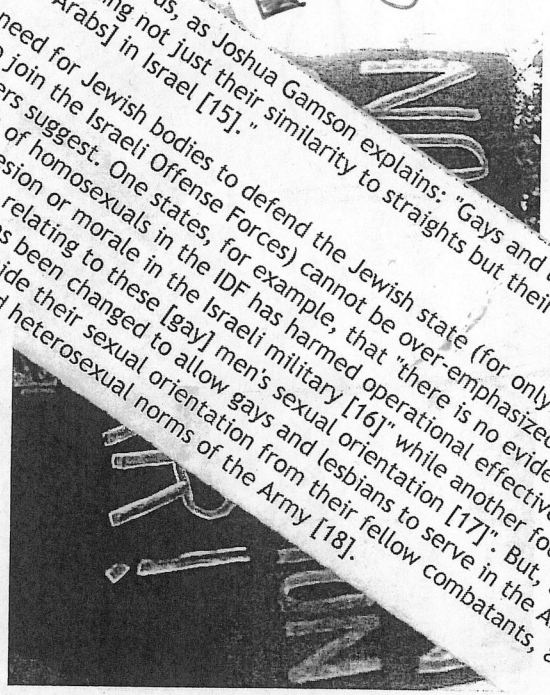
An interview with Anarchists against the wall in The other Israel by Haim Bar`am
again, its a hard copy but might be available at http://www.awalls.org/

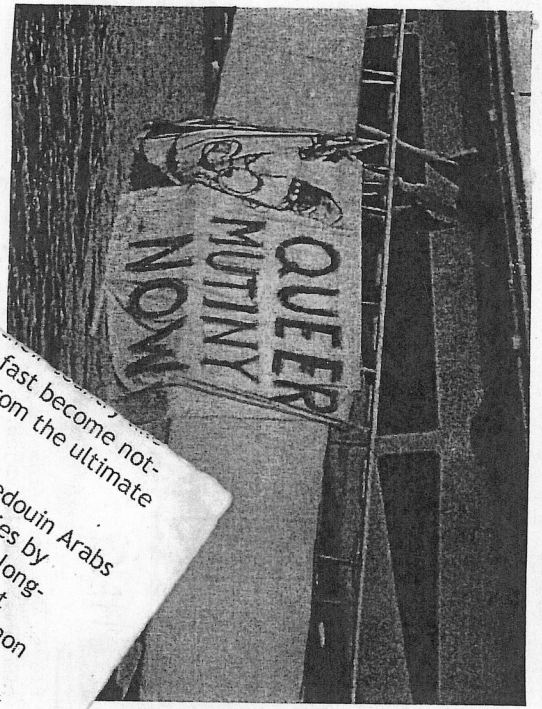
questions, comments, criticism, recipes, love declarations, or hate mail to:
blakkandredd@hotmail.com

This is equality

everyone else [14]. Thus, as Joshua Gamson explains: "Gays and lesbians have fast become not-Other by emphasizing not just their similarity to straights but their difference from the ultimate Other [i.e. the Arabs] in Israel [15]."

Indeed, the need for Jewish bodies to defend the Jewish state (for only Druze and Bedouin Arabs are allowed to join the Israeli Offense Forces) cannot be over-emphasized as two studies by Israeli researchers suggest. One states, for example, that "there is no evidence that the long-standing inclusion of homosexuals in the IDF has harmed operational effectiveness, combat readiness, unit cohesion or morale in the Israeli military [16]" while another found "no common adjustment problems relating to these [gay] men's sexual orientation [17]". But, as one paper notes, while the law has been changed to allow gays and lesbians to serve in the Army, the vast majority still choose to hide their sexual orientation from their fellow combatants, and instead adapt to the masculine and heterosexual norms of the Army [18].





we want liberation!